

## **Sen. Al Franken's Remarks on Attack in Somalia**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the recent terrorist attack in Somalia.

On October 14, a truck filled with explosives detonated in a crowded district in Mogadishu—Somalia's capital. The blast was especially devastating because the truck blew up next to a fuel tanker, causing a massive fireball and leveling structures, including the nearby Safari hotel which collapsed and trapped many people under its rubble. According to Somali authorities, the target of the attack may have been the city's international airport which also houses many embassies.

Mr. President, this was the worst terrorist attack in Somalia's history. 358 people were killed. Hundreds have been injured. Dozens are still missing.

As a Minnesota Senator I represent the largest Somali-American population in the nation. For Minnesota, this wasn't just a massive attack overseas. It affected every one of my estimated 74,000 Somali-American constituents.

Among those killed is Ahmed Eyow. He was from Bloomington, Minnesota. He had attended Normandale Community College, and Metropolitan State University. He left behind his wife and three children.

Another Somali American who was killed in the blast was Mohamoud Elmi. He had lived in Ohio and had moved back to Somalia just about two years ago. He was a young man with a bright future, working at the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management in Somalia.

And there was Abukar Mohamed. He lived in Virginia before moving back to Somalia where he worked in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. He was killed along with his wife, Shadiye Hassan. They left behind 7 children who are between the ages of 3 and 20.

Hundreds of others perished in that heinous attack. They all have their own stories. They left behind their wives, their husbands, their children, their friends, their parents.

Mr. President, Somalia is one of, if not the most fragile nation on earth. It has been an incredibly difficult country to govern ever since a civil war tore the country apart in 1991. It suffers from the massive displacement of people, hundreds of thousands of refugees, lack of sufficient public services, and warring factions and clans.

To make matters worse, a severe drought has ravaged Somalia, leaving 6 million people—half of the country’s population, facing food shortages. The combination of instability, lack of security, and shortage of goods and services have enabled terrorist groups like Al Shabaab—widely believed to be the culprit behind this attack—to gain a foothold in Somalia.

Mr. President we have to have a comprehensive strategy to help the people of Somalia. One component of that strategy is to help Somalis root out terrorism. The government of Somalia has announced its intent to step-up the fight against Al-Shaabab. The United States has and will continue to aid those efforts. As will the African Union Mission in Somalia—a multi-national peace keeping force that is supported by the United States.

At the same time, we have to erode and eliminate the conditions that enable terrorist groups to thrive. That means redoubling our efforts to help stabilize fragile nations—that means supporting good governance, reducing extreme inequality, and helping marginalized, disenfranchised individuals who are preyed upon time and again by terrorist recruiters.

Mr. President, it's more important than ever that we fully fund our international programs that support these efforts. Both for humanitarian and for security reasons.

Unfortunately, the administration's 2018 budget proposal does the opposite. It includes a 30 percent cut to programs that seek to bring stability, rule of law, and humanitarian assistance to places that need it most. The administration's budget is making the world, and us, less safe. And I want to urge the President to rethink his approach to foreign aid.

My colleagues, Senators John McCain and Tim Kaine put it well in a recent op-ed they coauthored, saying:

“Today, 80 percent of our assistance provides relief and promotes stability in conflict zones and states on the verge of collapse. There are U.S. Agency for International Development programs in many of the countries most plagued by terrorism, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mali, Yemen and Somalia. We’re saving lives and creating partners to help address the instability that produces the threats our military risks life and limb to fight.”

Mr. President, in conclusion, I want to urge my colleagues and the American people to not forget about the terrible tragedy in Somalia. I want to urge everyone to keep Somali victims and other victims of terror acts throughout the world in your thoughts and prayers.

The world needs to know that the United States will continue to support Somalia and other nations that are fighting those wreaking havoc on their nations.

But we have to remember that we will be all more successful when we combine military efforts with diplomatic and humanitarian ones.

And while we cannot bring back those who perished, if we focus on rooting out the conditions that give rise to terrorism, we can have a shot at averting the next one.

Thank you Mr. President